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Students invited to write Letters about Literature

Letters About Literature is a national reading and writing promotion program for children grades 4–12, sponsored by the Montana Center for the Book at Humanities Montana and the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. Each fall, students are invited to write to an author of their choosing, living or dead, whose book they have found especially meaningful. State and national winners are announced in the spring.

The next submissions deadlines are: Dec. 10 for Level 3: grades 9–12; and Jan. 10 for Level 1: grades 4–6, and Level 2: grades 7–8.

The Montana Center for the Book selects the top essayists in the state on each of the three competition levels. State winners advance to national competition and receive cash prizes. The top three state winners in each age category receive cash prizes and certificates from the Montana Center for the Book and the Humanities Montana.

Teachers, librarians, or parents interested in obtaining copies of the contest guidelines and lesson plans, including State Common Core Standard materials, should visit the Center for the Book website at www.read.gov/letters. To obtain the required entry coupon, visit www.humanitiesmontana.org.

ARTS EDUCATION

Arts Education director happy to be back home

By Emily Kohring

I am so glad to be home. When I graduated from Helena High School in 1989, my teenage brain could not wait to leave Montana. I did that, but on my many visits home over the years I came to appreciate what I left behind.

I sometimes commented to friends and family that if I ever found the right job in the arts in Montana, I would move back. Well, it happened!

I am looking forward to serving as director of arts education at the Montana Arts Council, where I get to support arts organizations, teaching artists, schools and educators across the state in their efforts to provide quality arts learning experiences to Montana students and life-long learners.

I believe Montana is a place that fosters exceptional creativity in young people. Many of the most creative and successful people I know are Montanans.

I got my creative start at Grandstreet Theatre School in Helena, where I began taking classes and performing in shows in ninth grade. At Grandstreet, I discovered my own creative potential, and also discovered a community of people rooting for my success.

“The process of making art develops the habits of mind for success that transfer to any discipline the child may choose in the future. All children deserve that success.”

– Emily Kohring



Participating in theater changed my life’s path at a young age, and it’s a story I know I share with many of my fellow Grandstreet alumni.

I spent nearly a decade as education director at a small, well-respected theater company in St. Louis. I have been fortunate to collaborate over the years with many outstanding arts organizations in all disciplines doing terrific, innovative programming. I’ve learned a lot about what works and what doesn’t work when it comes to arts education programming.

Most recently I spent two years as a theatre instructor at a school for the performing and visual arts in inner-city St. Louis. Though I was a visiting artist in other teacher’s classrooms for many years and thought I under-

stood public education, nothing could replace the experience of being in the trenches as a classroom teacher. I hope my real-world experience in education will help guide my planning and decision-making as I begin my work.

I believe every child should have access to quality arts experiences – not just the opportunity to view art in the form of field trips to museums, concerts and plays, but to create art and participate in the creative process. The process of making art develops the habits of mind for success that transfer

to any discipline the child may choose in the future. All children deserve that success.

There is a lot of talk about STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) in education, but a goal I know I share with many arts educators is to change STEM to STEAM – inserting the A for Arts back into the education agenda.

I am very excited to work with teachers and schools to think about ways the Montana Arts Council can support arts education for K-12 students and lifelong learners. Dialogue with me by following our arts education blog at bigskyartsed.wordpress.com and follow me on Twitter @BigSkyArtsED.



Megan McNamer introduces Missoula Writing Collaborative students Elissa Taylor and David Bower at TEDx UMontana. (Photo by Todd Goodrich, University Relations)

MWC students share poems

Two students in Missoula Writing Collaborative (MWC) programs were invited to share their original writing Sept. 19 at TEDx UMontana. The event was live streamed and is archived at www.umd.edu/tedx/default.php.

Elissa Taylor, age 15, and David Bower, age 10, read their work at an artistic interlude during the first half of the evening’s line-up of speakers.

TED is a nonprofit organization devoted to “ideas worth spreading.” Started as a conference in California 26 years ago, TED has grown to support those world-changing ideas with many initiatives. TEDx is a program of local, self-organized events that bring people together to share a TED-like experience. At a TEDx event, TEDTalks video and live speakers combine to spark deep discussion and connection in a small group.

MWC Executive Director Megan McNamer introduced the reading this way:

“Since 1994 the Missoula Writing Collaborative has brought creative writing to over 30,000 children, teaching them the value of curiosity, imagination, connection, struggle, and play.

“We serve over 20 schools each year in western Montana and beyond, and, recently, through a National Endowment for the Arts Our Town grant, we’ve taken this teaching to the streets, and up the mountains, and down to the rivers, as students explore the wild and urban places they call home.

“Our students learn from the ‘greats’ – Pablo Neruda, Elizabeth Bishop, Richard Hugo, James Welch. And they work directly with people in our community who have made writing their life’s work. Many of these writers studied at The University of Montana, and young adults who once had our program as kids are studying there now. Some have returned to their childhood schools as teachers themselves.

“They teach their students that their greatest material consists of the details – simple and profound – of their own lives. Students quickly connect this to the experience of others and to facts about all kinds of things: from what it’s like to live in Nicaragua to the moisture content of clouds.

“Writing creatively means asking big questions: What is this earth? Who am I on it? And connecting these questions to tangible things – the play of shadows on water ... an imagined encounter on an unpaved road ... the memory of a grandmother’s hair.

“Paying attention to simple things helps anyone develop a poetic sensibility, and a poetic sensibility opens up the world. Suddenly, poetry is everywhere, and when it comes to enjoying this wealth of experience, each child is as rich as the next.”

For more information about MWC, visit www.missoulawritingcollaborative.org, email meganmcnamer@gmail.com or call 406-549-3348.

Elissa Taylor and David Bower read the follow original works during TEDx UMontana:

Beautiful Morning

There is a fresh atmosphere this morning.
Birds chirping, fresh smells.
Eggs cooking, people sleeping.
The beautiful morning.

Acrostic

Alone in the dark
Inside the big, dusty box
Reading the forbidden book.

– David L. Bower, age 10

The Land

Reflecting on “Going to the Sun (Chief Mountain),” the artwork of Julius Seyler

The land feels different.
In all the neighboring pockets of universe
you hear the wind taste the dust
and know the big space.

The land feels different.
In all the next door pieces of universe
colors are faded as if worn by time
and thrown lightly.

The land feels different.
In this snippet of universe
you hear the stream taste pure air
and know the closeness of the land.

The land feels different.
In this bubble of universe
colors are bright as if glowing with vitality
and set down heavily.

The land feels.

– Elissa Taylor, age 15